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No Child Left Behind deadline arrives; no state passes

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WASHINGTON — Not a single state will have a highly qualified teacher in every core class this school year as promised by President Bush's education law. Nine states along with the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico face penalties.

The Education Department on Friday ordered every state to explain how it will have 100 percent of its core teachers qualified — belatedly — in the 2006-07 school year.

In the meantime, some states face the loss of federal aid because they didn't make enough effort to comply on time, officials said.

They are Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina and Washington, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"At some point there was, I suspect, a little bit of notion that 'This too shall pass,'" said Henry Johnson, the assistant secretary over elementary and secondary education. "Well, the day of reckoning is here, and it's not going to pass."

Department officials would not say how much aid could be withheld from states to force compliance. But Johnson said: "In some cases, we're talking about large amounts of money."

States often fell short because they did not report accurate or complete data about the quality of the teacher corps, said Rene Islas, who oversees the department's review.

The four-year-old No Child Left Behind law says teachers must have a bachelor's degree, a state license and proven competency in every subject they teach by this year. The first federal order of its kind, it applies to teachers of math, history and any other core class.

In grading the states, the department found that 29, including Arizona, have made substantial progress. They must improve but do not face looming sanctions.

Twelve other states are still under review and haven't been rated: Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

No matter which category they are in, all the states must submit a new plan of action.

Most states give themselves good grades on teacher quality; 33 states say 90 to 99 percent of their classes are taught by highly qualified teachers. Most of the rest put their numbers a tier below, in a range of 70 to 89 percent.

Arizona has a high percentage of highly qualified teachers, according to statistics provided to the federal government.

The recent numbers show Arizona has reported at least 90.6 percent of classes were taught by a highly qualified teacher. Wealthier districts were doing even better, with up to 98.6 percent of classes taught by such teachers.

But some local school officials cautioned months ago that the numbers may be inflated.

For example, officials in Tucson's largest school district — Tucson Unified, which enrolls more than 60,000 students

and employs more than 3,000 teachers — calculated early this year that 96 percent of its teachers meet the federal standards.

But the district's director of employment services said the figure may be unintentionally inflated because of confusion about the requirements.

In fact, that confusion was so widespread that state education officials were drafting a request for an extension to the "highly qualified" requirement. On Friday, state schools Superintendent Tom Horne said the U.S. Department of Education is mostly looking for "a good-faith effort" to get all teachers qualified.

"It's utterly impossible" to have 100 percent of teachers be qualified teachers, he said. He also said the federal government has reported Arizona is "making a good showing" in its push toward complete qualification.

— Jeff Commings

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